



SCIENCE-Fiction Fanzine

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### חדשות האגודה – מאי 2017 The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

מועדון הקריאה בת"א: "דברים מוזרים קורים" מאת קלי לינק, ביום ה', 4-5-2017, ב-20:00, ב"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2, מנחה: גלי אחיטוב  
בנוסף בת"א: "גר בארץ מכריה" מאת רוברט היינלין, ויתקיים ביום ה', 18-5-2017, ב-20:00, ב"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2. מנחה: דפנה קירש

המועדון בירושלים "סיפורי חייך ואחרים" מאת טד צ'יאנג, ביום ג', 23-5-2017, ב-19:30, ב"נגילה", משיח ברוכץ 5. מנחה: גלי אחיטוב  
כל האירועים של האגודה מופיעים בלוח האירועים (שפע אירועים מעניינים, הרצאות, סדנאות, מפגשים ועוד)

לקבלת עדכונים שוטפים על מפגשי מועדון הקריאה ברחבי הארץ ניתן להצטרף לרשימת התפוצה או לדף האגודה בפייסבוק.

Society information is available (in Hebrew) at the Society's site: <http://www.sf-f.org.il>

### **This month's roundup:**

- Celebrating 40 years of Voyager
- Follow-up: Marvel Movies and TV Shows – What to Watch (and what NOT to)
- Some interesting items picked up from the Web (PCMag, CNET, and elsewhere)
- About the 'best' Alien invasion films
- The Holocaust and SF – Part II

And, of course, the Sheer Science section by Dr. Doron Calo: *AI Pros and Cons*

– Your editor editor, Leybl Botwinik

## Celebrating 40 years of Voyager



Dr. Ed Stone (credit: NASA-JPL-Caltech)



Voyager – artist's concept (NASA-JPL)

.... Almost 40 years later, after its flyby of Jupiter and Saturn, Voyager 1 is now in interstellar space, 20.6 billion kilometers, or 137 Astronomical Units (AU), from Earth. Some 17 billion kilometers from Earth, Voyager 2 took a slightly different route, going past Uranus and Neptune, and is currently in the heliosheath, the outermost layer of the heliosphere where solar wind is slowed by the pressure of interstellar gas. Simply put, both spacecraft have traveled further than any spacecraft has boldly gone before...

To read a fascinating Q&A with Dr. Stone who was NASA chief scientist at the time – and at 81 still is – see:

<http://www.pcmag.com/news/351829/40-years-of-voyager-a-q-a-with-dr-ed-stone-at-nasa-jpl>

## Marvel Movies and TV Shows – What to Watch (and what NOT to)

Last month, we offered a quick look at current and upcoming Marvel shows and movies, with a link to the full 'picture' (an infographic timeline of the interconnected films and shows) – see: <https://www.cnet.com/how-to/marvel-cinematic-universe-timeline-avengers/>

However, we didn't give you the benefit of our "expertise" ☺. So this is what we think.

The Movies are one-shots, so see them **all** for your enjoyment – or NOT – at your own risk ☺ (most are OK to great) [or see this ranking: <https://www.cnet.com/pictures/best-avengers-marvel-cinematic-universe-movies/> ]

However, the big question is whether to spend the time and energy to watch a complete TV season (or more), week after week. Here's our take, so far:

- 1) Shield – First season was best, but could have been much better. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> season are OK.
- 2) DareDevil – A definite thumbs up
- 3) Jessica Jones – We liked it – very emotional (Luke Cage also appears/debuts in it)
- 4) Agent Carter – So-so. Mostly interesting due to the timeframe: It takes place in 1940's America
- 5) Luke Cage – Yes, see this one
- 6) Iron Fist – Don't bother (**NOTE:** Reminds us of DC's "Arrow"). In truth, the original comic book story didn't have much to work with, in any case. They probably should have just introduced the hero to the Luke Cage series, since they partner up in the comics. – But they may both actually be half of the four heroes in the upcoming "Defenders" series. We'll know soon enough.

**NOTE:** The heroic "Claire Temple – the Night Nurse" cross-appears in Daredevil, Luke Cage, and Iron Fist. Also a common foe: the mystical and treacherous "Hand" organization.

## MORE UPDATES FROM THE WEB

### China, Europe in Talks to Build Moon Base

BY TOM BRANT APRIL 27, 2017



Mirroring their relationship on Earth, the US and Chinese governments could perhaps best be described as frenemies when it comes to outer space policy: the extent of their collaboration involves things like procedures for [how to avoid shooting down](#) one another's satellite-guided weapons.

So to advance its ambitious space exploration plans, Xi Jinping's government is now cozying up to the European Union, with talks underway to add China to a European Space Agency-led project to build a human outpost on the moon, the Associated Press [reported](#) this week.

Read the rest here:

<http://www.pcmag.com/news/353356/china-europe-in-talks-to-build-moon-base>

### Israeli Surgeons Perform World's First-Ever Dual Robotic Surgery



Israeli doctors at Hadassah Hospital Ein Kerem, in Jerusalem, made history last week when they performed the world's first-of-its-kind dual robotic surgery.

The revolutionary dual robotic surgery assisted in the repair of a severe spinal fracture suffered by Aharon Schwartz, 42, a Jerusalem factory worker injured when a steel object pinned him to the ground, fracturing his leg in two places and breaking six of his spinal vertebrae.

The three-hour-long procedure took place in the state-of-the-art \$30M underground hybrid operating theater at Hadassah's Sarah Wetsman Davidson Hospital Tower.

Read the rest here:

<https://unitedwithisrael.org/israeli-surgeons-perform-worlds-first-ever-dual-robotic-surgery>

## Can Online Games Keep the Modern World From Falling Apart?

BY [EVAN DASHEVSKY](#) JANUARY 25, 2017

Since the dawn of Pong, video games have been reliable lightning rods for criticism. Shoot-em-ups and mobile puzzlers alike have been accused of everything from contributing to pediatric obesity to cultivating anti-social tendencies to promoting devil worship — not to mention the perennial furor surrounding video game violence.

There are some downsides to constant gaming, but the charge that video games are detrimental to society because they stop people from cultivating real-world relationships might be misplaced. At least that's the argument made by author Richard Garriott (a.k.a. "Lord British") the game pioneer behind the Ultima series, which laid the groundwork for all RPG gaming and MMOs.

Read the rest here:

<http://www.pcmag.com/article/351191/can-online-games-keep-the-modern-world-from-falling-apart>

## Virtual Reality Is Here to Stay and It Needs Screenwriters

BY: [SHANEE EDWARDS](#) FEBRUARY 4, 2017

(PARK CITY, Utah) — Sundance Film Festival 2017 was all about virtual reality. It was everywhere, so if you think VR is still a thing of the future — think again. VR is here, and it needs screenwriters.

In a condo just off Main Street in Park City, I was lucky enough to participate in the VR experience *Astroids!*, a 360-degree animation. *Astroids!* is the sequel to [Baobab Studios'](#) first VR project, *Invasion!*, that won tons of awards including Tribeca Film Festival's 2016 "VR Selection of the Year" and featured the voice of Ethan Hawke.

*Astroids!* is about a pair of cute aliens, Mac and Cheez (Elizabeth Banks), a Laurel and Hardy type duo, and their robot-dog sidekick, Peas. Because the story is interactive, I would take on the role of a helper robot that would be tasked to save one of the characters when asteroids hit the spaceship.

Read the rest here:

<http://screenwritingmagazine.com/2017/02/04/virtual-reality-stay-needs-screenwriters/>

## Alien Invasion Films

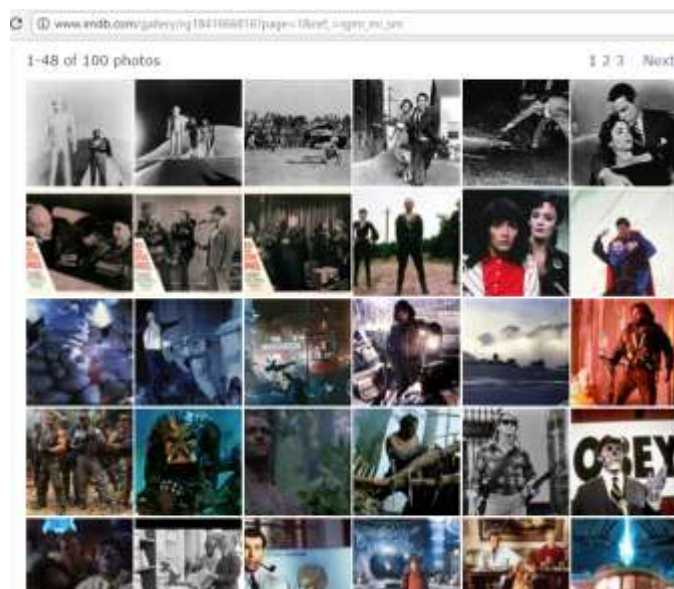
We were searching for something on the movie database site IMDB (can't quite remember what...) and came across the following webpage under a search for "Alien Invasion":

[http://www.imdb.com/find?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_fn&q=Alien+Invasion&s=all](http://www.imdb.com/find?ref_=nv_sr_fn&q=Alien+Invasion&s=all)

Under "keywords", 618 titles were 'hit', and the following webpage

[http://www.imdb.com/gallery/rg1841666816?page=3&ref\\_=rgmi\\_mi\\_sm](http://www.imdb.com/gallery/rg1841666816?page=3&ref_=rgmi_mi_sm)

brings up photo thumbnail links from 100 "*Alien Invasions Through the Years*".



Here are a few (we've only seen some of them – so this is an opportunity to catch up – one never knows when it's going to happen, so it's better to be prepared ☺):

\*The number in the parenthesis (x) refers to how many pics are available for that IMDB entry

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Arrival (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Attack the Block (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Battleship (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Cloverfield (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Cowboys &amp; Aliens (4)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">District 9 (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Dreamcatcher (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Edge of Tomorrow (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Independence Day (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Independence Day: Resurgence (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Invasion of the Body Snatchers (3)</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Lazer Team (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Lifeforce (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Mars Attacks! (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Men in Black (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Monsters (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Pacific Rim (4)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Predator (4)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Pixels (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Plan 9 from Outer Space (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Skyline (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Superman II (3)</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The Darkest Hour (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Day the Earth Stood Still (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Faculty (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Invasion (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Thing (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The World's End (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">They Live (4)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Transformers (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Under the Skin (3)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">War of the Worlds (3)</a></li> </ul>
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## The Holocaust and SF – Part II

BY: Leybl Botwinik

**NOTE:** In Part I, we mistakenly wrote that *SS-GB* was by Michael Crichton (who wrote *Westworld*)

There are two alternate histories recently serialized for TV about how the Nazis are victorious in World War II – and how the worst in mankind just keeps on getting worse (i.e. how low people will stoop to, to do evil or to acquiesce to evil). At the same time, the conflicts that are depicted here also show how high – to what level of sacrifice – people are willing to rise to, to do good or at least not to remain silent. The earlier one, “The Man in the High Castle”, from 2015 – mostly based in North America – has already seen 2 seasons (for a total of 20 episodes), with a 3<sup>rd</sup> one coming up soon.

The second one, “SS-GB” from 2017, is a 5 episode mini-series, based in England during WWII – We’ll cover this one next time.

Following are my thoughts and observations.

### 1 - Philip K. Dick: The Man in the High Castle TV Series (2015-)

For a more thorough briefing on the first 2 seasons of the show, there is a nice breakdown on Wikipedia here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Man\\_in\\_the\\_High\\_Castle\\_\(TV\\_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Man_in_the_High_Castle_(TV_series)) – of course, it contains some spoilers.

		
Nazi American Reich flag – from the TV series	Japanese Pacific States Flag	Nazi American Reich flag – from Penguin books novel

“The Man in the High Castle” is loosely based on a book by SF author Phillip K. Dick from 1962. Because of the size of the production, its scope covers many ‘main characters’ that appear with key roles, and in addition, there are two main settings for the story (the US east and

west coasts). The storyline presents a world in which the Axis powers (Germany, Japan, Italy) win World War II. Italy, by the way, is not mentioned at all in any of the 20 episodes so far.

The story takes place in the US that has capitulated to the Germans on the East coast, and to the Japanese on the West coast. There is a small sliver of the US called the Neutral Zone, buffering between these two occupying Super Powers. The year is 1960.

### **A brief background to the current state of affairs in the movie:**

Here's a brief look at the 'history' leading to the current situation (from what we could gather from the film's dialogue), and 'geography' as we understand it (a current World map would be useful – some glimpses appear in certain episodes, but only briefly and none too clearly):

- The Japanese physically invaded the US West coast, beating back the American forces
- The Germans, who had already defeated all of (or most of) Europe had managed to create the A-Bomb before the Americans, wiped out Washington with an atomic blast, and brought the US to its knees
- It's not clear if the USSR has been totally defeated by the Germans or not
- It seems that all of Africa is occupied by the Germans, and the Africans have all been exterminated (or mostly, with the rest – subjugated/enslaved)
- It's unclear about the Middle East, but it is a fact, that many Islamist leaders and their followers were pro-Nazi during WWII, and most likely all the Jews from Morocco through to Iran were exterminated, probably by the Islamist Arabs/Persians themselves
- The Germans have also completed exterminating all the Jews of Europe (not sure about Russia, though)
- The Japanese have conquered all of Asia and probably all of Oceania (it's unclear about Australia, India-Pakistan)
- It's not clear what happened in Central and South America – if they are occupied German territories.

Most likely they are vassals of sorts. Nor is there mention of the fate of the few hundred thousand Jews who were living there prior to WWII

- By 1960, the German technology is far more advanced than the Japanese (who don't have atomic tech, or supersonic aircraft, for example) – and although they are 'allied', there is a very high level of tension between them – with each side planning to invade/attack the other
- In one episode there is a plan (or it's already been carried out) by the Reich, to close off the Mediterranean sea (around Gibraltar), pump out all the seawater and create a fertile plain connecting Europe to Africa, for agriculture and living – that is an interesting super-project!
- Whereas the Americans capitulated to the Germans and formed the American Reich, conditions are mostly very favorable to the occupied Americans – to those that collaborate
- Under the occupied Japanese West coast, the Americans are not Japanese/Oriental (in fact, even Japanese Americans are looked down upon and also not considered equals by the occupying forces). Consequently, the scenery and living conditions of the citizens in San Francisco under the Japanese seem darker and more forlorn when compared with the East coast.
- Hitler is still alive – but aging and not well
- Except for any Jews still under Japanese occupation or possibly in either South America or in the vastness of Russia – it seems most likely that 95-98% of world Jewry has been wiped out.

### **And now, to the story itself:**

The first episode does a good job of presenting a quick global view of what the main thrusts of the storyline are – at least background-wise.



However, in addition to the "Alternate History" aspect of this as SF – there seems to be a mystical bridge between this world and our world where the Nazis and Japanese were defeated. This is brought up by the fact that there are 'old' films being collected by both Hitler and the US Resistance showing scenes and 'news reports' of the Allied victories leading to the defeat of the Axis powers – as actually occurred in our reality.

However, there are also other films of events that don't seem to have occurred in either of our worlds – so this may be a hint that there is some sort of a gateway to other realities/dimensions. In fact, some of the film scenes contain people who are key players in the TV series – but they act out scenes, or things happen to them – that never happened in their own reality.

The show presents several main characters – all of whom play very well and realistically – causing the viewer to continuously jump back and forth from coast to coast, and between the subplots of the characters. In one instance (over several episodes), a main character manages to jump over to a parallel world – our reality, where the Axis lost the war. In another episode, we discover that at least one person is not from the current reality, but stepped over from a parallel place.

By 1960, the American Reich East coast is very relaxed and carefree, with 'picture-perfect' suburban homes with non-working mothers and their 3 children, with them going to school in uniforms reminiscent of boy-scout groups (actually "Hitler-yugnt"). Everything is Nazi/German-style sanitized – including the Aryan practice of killing off unhealthy 'inferior' individuals, and there are no blacks or other ethnic groups visible (e.g. Latinos or Italians).

On the other hand, there is also an underlying falseness or brittleness here – like a very fragile glass sculpture – at least for the American adults that know of a different past. The kids are brainwashed to love Hitler and accept the Nazi way of race superiority and 'sanitation'.

Just recently, new facts have emerged on how the Allies themselves had known of the atrocities and massacres of hundreds of thousands of Jews (and others) fairly early in the war. It was popularly thought, until now, that the Allies had little clue or little corroboration about the masses of deaths, war crimes, and exterminations carried out by the Germans – until near the end of the war (after liberating the cities and particularly the concentration camps, etc.). Even doing

You can feel the stark difference in the occupied Americans' lifestyles under the Japanese occupied US West coast (San Francisco), as well as in the mountainous Neutral zone regions. Each of these regions seems to still be under military occupation – with curfews, soldiers patrolling, etc.

We're not going to go too deeply into the characters of the series and their interactions – which are quite complex but well played and well thought out by the writers. Complex but integrated.

Instead, a few words about collaboration and resistance. On the Japanese side, the Americans who are collaborating are doing it mostly under duress. On the German side, the Americans are mostly 'happy' or 'satisfied' with the occupation, and don't really feel it, except for occasional glimpses of uniformed Nazis. The same concerns the Resistance. The West coast resistance is more limited in possible spy and attack choices (the Caucasians Americans physically stand out, and their financial possibilities are more restricted).

Is this aspect of the story plausible: that most of America would capitulate and 'accept' the new reality? We know from the history of WWII, how the citizens (and in particular – leadership) of many countries that fell under the Germans became their vassals. There were resistance movements – but few and far between. As a point of fact, the Germans created local SS units and divisions in countries like the Ukraine and Lithuania. Collaborators and traitors were abundant.

There are stories of how German Wehrmacht (regular army) officers would stop locals from murdering Jews – because no one had ordered them to; Of Lithuanian and Ukrainian hunter-squads searching out Jews to hand them over to the Germans and/or punishing anyone daring to help a Jew; There were bounties paid out to locals for every Jew handed over to these groups and/or the German occupiers.

little or nothing worked in favour of the German conquests in Europe (and somewhat in North Africa), vis-à-vis the terrible fate of Millions of Jews and others who suffered from or were exterminated as a result of the German racial laws.

[see: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/world-history/holocaust-allied-forces-knew-before-concentration-camp-discovery-us-uk-soviets-secret-documents-a7688036.html>]

In conclusion, the series is quite chilling in how 'real' it depicts a world that – thank God – never came into being. After 2 seasons, it will be interesting to see what is in store for the viewers concerning the real role of the films that the mysterious "Man in the High Castle" is collecting (and why he is called that). It is still unclear how the films 'arrive' into this reality – who is responsible for passing them over, who initially picks them up (and from where), if there is a space nexus, etc.

## Sheer\* Science: Is AI Good\*\* for Us?

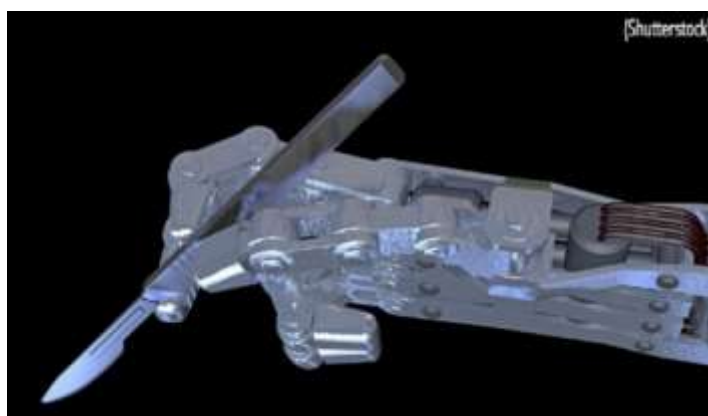
(\* In memory of Aharon Sheer (נ"ט) – Founding Editor)

– Prepared by: Doron Calo\*\*, PhD (\*\*our CC Sheer Science editor ☺)

[\*\* LB: This is not the original title that Doron gave to his article, but when I first wrote it down, I wrote "Is AI God for us?" – what a Freudian slip ...]

### Pros and Cons of AI

**Artificial intelligence** has always been the focal point of much debate as to whether it's going to be the boon or bane of humanity in the future. The advantages of **thinking machines** seem limitless – but also the potential **hazards**. Science fiction has taken both stances, both in favor (for example, the benevolent **Minds** of Iain M. Banks' **Culture** books) and against (e.g. Dune's **Butlerian Jihad**). And since we're actually "living in the future", signs for both AI scenarios have actually recently appeared.



First, the good news: a computer program learned how to recognize confirmed cases of **heart attacks**, and managed to make **predictions** that were actually **better** than those provided by a human doctor. The machine went over more than **295,000** records and constructed its own "**rules**" for identifying patients at risk. Out of the 4 different programs tested, the one built around a "**neural network**" **algorithm** (a computer model loosely based on the behavior of a biological brain) did so well, that it managed to identify **355 cases of heart attack** that the physicians had missed.

In other words, were this a real-life scenario, the lives of 355 people could have been **saved** by AI. The program even managed to identify **risk factors** not included in medical guidelines (mental illness and oral steroids). Interestingly, diabetes wasn't on the AI's list of high-ranking risk factors! Obviously, this will prompt more research, so that we'll be able to find out the clinical implications.

[LB: Also check out the link above, about the Israeli dual robotic surgery]



And here are the not-so-good news: machine-learning techniques are **hard to trace** – they're "**black boxes**" in which you know what the **input** and the **output** are, but it's difficult to know how the computer reached its decisions. This problem is not only academic: as we increasingly rely on AI to assist us, we should also know more about its **decision-making**.

For instance, **criminal courts** use machine-learning algorithms (a growing trend in the US) to determine the "**risk**" posed by a defendant. These programs are used, for instance, to evaluate the probability of the defendant committing another crime, and this "risk" outcome can affect decisions about **bail** and **sentencing**.

Do we want to have AIs participate in legal decision-making? Personally, I think it's a bad idea. Unlike the algorithms used to predict heart disease, the legal algorithms are usually supplied by **private companies** that tend to keep their code **confidential**, and there is hardly any official **oversight** over its development. Such a program has recently led a **Wisconsin** judge to hand out a long sentence for a "**high-risk**" defendant in a drive-by shooting case. This ruling was challenged in the state supreme court, claiming that the ruling was based on an **undisclosed algorithm**, so that nobody really knows whether the right decision was reached – and so, it was **thrown out**.

So how would we know? In my opinion, for us to treat an AI as a "black box" and not challenge its judgement should only be allowed after **rigorous inspection** of the algorithm, the same way that a member of the **jury** is selected, based on him/her being considered a normative, reasonable member of society. Right now, I don't see it happening and I find this quite worrisome!

### Links

Self-taught artificial intelligence beats doctors at predicting heart attacks:

<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/04/self-taught-artificial-intelligence-beats-doctors-predicting-heart-attacks>

Courts are using AI to sentence criminals:

<https://www.wired.com/2017/04/courts-using-ai-sentence-criminals-must-stop-now/>

AI Judge to Deliver Verdicts for trials on Human Rights:

<http://naijtimes.com/2016/10/24/tech-artificial-intelligence-judge-to-deliver-verdicts-for-trials-on-human-rights-robots/>

***We'd love to hear your thoughts on any of the above subjects and we may publish some of them!***

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